

*Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association*

<b>Legislation before the Environment Committee on March 14, 2011</b>	<b>Support/ Oppose</b>
H.B. 6386: AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.	Support
H.B. 5363: AN ACT TRANSFERRING THE CONSERVATION FUNCTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.	Oppose

Co-Chairs Meyer, Roy, and Members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Eric Hammerling and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association, the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. As you know, CFPA has offered testimony before the Legislature on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation every year since 1897.

A top priority for any Administration is to put excellent people in leadership positions. This Administration has done so in the appointments of Daniel Esty and Steven Reviczky as Commissioners for the Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Agriculture respectively.

At the same time, the Administration has made it a priority to reduce the number of state agencies by 30 percent – from 81 to 57 agencies. They have done their best to identify agencies with overlapping issue areas and jurisdiction to combine and, with some exceptions such as the Council on Environmental Quality which we believe should maintain its independence, this generally makes sense. It is in this spirit that we support H.B. 6386: An Act Establishing the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

The mission of the Department of Environmental Protection is “to conserve, improve and protect the natural resources and environment of the State of Connecticut in such a manner as to encourage the social and economic development of Connecticut while preserving the natural environment and the life forms it supports in a delicate, interrelated and complex balance, to the end that the state may fulfill its responsibility as trustee of the environment for present and future generations.” Adding energy to its charge is consistent with its existing mission. In fact, it is almost inconceivable that the Department could meet its mission without also working simultaneously on energy sector issues that are so inextricably linked to its responsibilities under the Global Warming Solutions Act and Climate Change Action Plan.

Although we support H.B. 6386, we have lingering significant concerns about whether DEEP will receive the resources necessary to carry out its critical mission. Already we have heard from the DEP that it would need 60 additional staff and another half million dollars in resources if it's going to significantly reduce the time it takes to process permits for businesses. We're further told that even hiring 60 new people for permits alone would not bring the Department back to where it was before the early retirement programs of the last few years.

We could also argue that the infrastructure of our amazing State Forests, Parks, and Wildlife Management Areas, as well as the land conservation, law enforcement, and environmental education programs of the Department are chronically underfunded. Adding Energy to DEEP must complement these environmental conservation functions and not take away from these other critical pieces of the Department's mission.

That being said, we take seriously what Commissioner Esty stated in his recent testimony to the Executive & Legislative Nominations Committee, namely:

- "I have a long-standing and sincere concern for our environment and how we, as stewards, protect our natural resources for future generations."
- "We must also continue to provide outstanding state parks and outdoor recreation opportunities for our citizens, maintain our state forests, and manage wildlife in a sound and scientific manner."
- "We are the guardians of an extraordinary set of natural resources in a beautiful state. We must continue working to expand access to and utilization of our parks, forests, lakes, rivers, and the ocean, encouraging every citizen to become more active and connected to the Great Outdoors."

Commissioner Esty deserves an opportunity to work assiduously to ensure that support for all DEEP programs will be more robust over time. This is why we oppose H.B. 5363.

Sending Environmental Conservation programs out of DEEP and into the Department of Agriculture would neither reduce a state agency (there would still be two) nor would it make either re-packaged department more efficient or effective at meeting its goals. Indeed, if we could travel back in time, the best way to combine all natural resource programs might have been to bring the Department of Agriculture into DEEP to make it DEEPA. This combined model would be similar to what seems to be working well in Massachusetts. In that state, Secretary Richard K. Sullivan, Jr. of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs oversees six environmental, natural resource, and energy regulatory agencies: the Departments of Environmental Protection, Public Utilities, Energy Resources, Conservation & Recreation, Agriculture, and Fish & Game.

Despite our opposition to H.B. 5363, we do believe that it is critical for DEEP and the Department of Agriculture to work together closely as partners. The joint efforts on CT Grown wood products are a recent promising example of how well these partnership efforts can work!